

Friday's Feature
By
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August in the Northwest Florida Garden

August is a tough month for gardening in Florida due to the hot weather. Many people will be tempted to stay indoors and avoid the heat; however, gardeners know that there is still plenty to do in the garden and landscape.

August can be a very active month in the vegetable garden. Many of our warm season vegetables can be planted in August including green beans, lima beans, cucumbers, southern peas, peppers, pumpkin, summer squash, winter squash and tomatoes. Be aware, however, that the late planted summer vegetables are more prone to insect and disease problems than the same crops planted in the spring.

It's also a great time to plan your fall vegetable garden. Many cool season vegetables can be planted in September. It's important, however, to prepare the soil now.

Select a well-drained site for a vegetable garden with at least six hours of direct sunlight. Have a pH test done if you have not done this within the last year. A pH test will tell you if lime is needed. Don't add lime without knowing what your pH is currently--too much lime is as bad as not enough. Be sure to add a generous amount of organic material such as compost, animal manure or rotted leaves. It's difficult to add too much organic matter to our sandy soils since the climate favors the rapid decomposition of organic matter. Allow at least three weeks between the incorporation of amendments and planting.

August is prime time for lawn problems. Be on the look out for spittlebugs in centipedegrass and chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns. A few of these insects is usually not a problem. However, if you see noticeable damage to your lawn, contact your local Extension office for control options.

Various lawn diseases are also present at this time of year. Frequent summer showers, high humidity and warm temperatures provide ideal conditions for the development of fungal diseases such as gray leaf spot and brown patch. Avoid contributing to a favorable disease environment by watering too often.

Consider adjusting your mowing height up a notch or two during the summer. The more top growth the plant has the more leaf area it has to harvest sunlight and ultimately grow roots.

Take the time to scout your trees and shrubs for problems. Look for the azalea defoliator caterpillar on azaleas. These are large black caterpillars that can strip the foliage very quickly. Pick them off by hand or remove the twig they are on.

Tip of the Week: This time of year, don't be alarmed if you notice a very odd gray to black patch in your lawn. If you look closely and see tiny, round balls scattered over the plant, you have a slime mold.

Slime molds normally live on the soil where they feed on decaying organic matter. They do not feed on living plants, but only use them for support during reproduction. The damage to turf and other plants would be only from shading them from sunlight, which may cause the leaf blades to temporarily turn yellow.

Slime molds most often occur in wet weather. They disappear rapidly as soon as it becomes dry. Control is usually not necessary. You can break up the masses by sweeping with a broom or by spraying with a strong stream of water.



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